

**Sacred Heart School**

# Building On The Tradition

Yankton School's Long History Of Providing Catholic Education Looks To Strong Future

BY LORETTA SORENSEN  
P&D Correspondent

For 130 years, the Yankton community has had access to a Catholic education through Sacred Heart School (SHS). Today, with both an elementary and middle school facility, SHS offers education from preschool through eighth grade. The opportunity is provided by the collective support of local Catholic parishes — Sacred Heart and St. Benedict — as well as the Sioux Falls Catholic Diocese, Yankton Catholic Community Foundation, students, parents, teachers and the efforts of a plethora of local volunteers.

SHS elementary principal Laura Haberman and middle school principal Dr. Tim Mulhair say a growing number of families are taking advantage of this educational opportunity.

"I attended O'Gorman in Sioux Falls for the first 12 years of my education," Mulhair says. "At the time, I didn't recognize the value of that experience. Now, returning to a Catholic school as an administrator, I understand the importance of having opportunity to choose Catholic education."

SHS, with a current enrollment of 348, found the need to add a second principal. Dr. Mulhair became assistant principal in 2010 to serve at the middle school facility at 509 Capital. In 2014 he was appointed full-time principal at the Middle School which is now adjoined with Sacred Heart Parish. Haberman oversees the elementary school that adjoins St. Benedict Catholic Church at 1500 St. Benedict Drive. Mulhair and Haberman interact daily to help maintain the uniformity and sense of community that has long been a major element of the school.

"Everyone at the school works together to provide a quality learning environment for students," Haberman says. "One thing I appreciate is the level of parent involvement. Whether we need parents to help transport students to events or off-site classes, help in classrooms or with school activities, we always have a great response."

Tuition is part of the funding arm of SHS, however administrators point out that they don't allow the cost of attending a private school to keep students from enrolling.

"We have a Tuition Assistance Program to keep our school accessible, affordable and available to all families," Haberman says. "While the Catholic faith is an important part of our educational activities, students don't have to be Catholic in order to enroll."

The "family-like" atmosphere at SHS is one of

the school's enduring traditions. Enrollment records verify that some families have attended SHS from generation to generation. Haberman notes that one major change in the school from years past is the loss of Catholic Sisters who often served as teachers.

"Sister Margo Tschetter retired two years ago," Haberman says. "She was the last Sister who taught here. Many of our current teachers have been here for several years. That's at least in part because they appreciate the respectful, courteous attitude of students, teachers, staff and administration, a much appreciated attitude seen throughout the school."

Lisa Barger has taught kindergarten at SHS for 24 years. She sees her career choice as a "true blessing."

"I have not only been fortunate enough to teach here, three of my children have graduated from the school," Barger says. "Sacred Heart School has touched many hearts and minds throughout the years. I am blessed to part of that tradition. I'm proud to teach in a school where everything we do is centered around Jesus. We teach and enrich students with high academic standards and family values in a Christ-centered environment."

Barger also appreciates the opportunity to share her personal faith, a sentiment which Haberman echoes.

"From the first time that I walked into the school building, I sensed something different here, something welcoming and right," Haberman says. "This year, just before school started, our teachers and staff gathered for a spiritual retreat, something we will continue to do every year. The experience helped all of us strengthen and build our faith. With that, it will allow us to strengthen our students' faith."

Haberman says she and SHS teachers are blessed with opportunities to incorporate the Gospel values that shape their own lives into daily school activities.

"As they teach the curriculum, teachers can incorporate life lessons and take advantage of opportunities to build leadership skills," Haberman says. "Since our class sizes average about 16 students, teachers are able to give students more individual attention."

The SHS mission includes using the shared values of compassion, respect, honesty, a Christ-like lifestyle and stewardship in daily routines. Each year, students from both buildings gather to participate in academic and faith-based activities. They also organize community service projects, such as donating supplies to the local Contact Center.

"What I've seen in students here since I came here four years ago is a growth and devel-



PHOTO: LORETTA SORENSEN

Dr. Tim Mulhair, Sacred Heart Middle School principal, and Laura Haberman, who serves as Sacred Heart Elementary School principal, appreciate the opportunity to play a role in providing the Yankton community with a Catholic education option.

opment of respect and reverence for one another, the school, the community and for God," Haberman says. "It's very rewarding to see students and staff grow in their faith."

Partnering with the public school system allows SHS students to enjoy extracurricular activities such as band, art and athletics. The two entities also collaborate to provide speech services and consultation.

Mulhair explains that the smaller size of schools such as SHS often generate a life-long sense of belonging in students.

"I still feel a close connection to O'Gorman and I see that in former students who return here as adults for a visit," Mulhair says. "Even after 50 years, graduates have a sense that they're still Sacred Hearters. It's not easy to explain until you experience it, but there's a bond that goes far beyond just having at-

tended school here."

Each week, SHS students have opportunity to attend Mass. They also play an active role in celebrating events such as Catholic Schools week. During the last week of January, both schools celebrate their faith in countless ways. In 2014, a majority of Sacred Heart school students will celebrate the Eucharist together at a Diocesan-wide All Schools Mass in Sioux Falls.

"That's something our students really enjoy," Haberman says. "My daughter attends school here and I have seen her faith grow tremendously since she enrolled. My own relationship with God has increased as a result of working here and I know the school has been a great blessing for me and my family."

More information about Sacred Heart School is available at [www.sacredheartschool.org](http://www.sacredheartschool.org).

**Mo. Valley Christian Academy**

# MVCA Dedicated To Christ-Centered Education For Kids

BY LORETTA SORENSEN  
P&D Correspondent

It was local parents desiring an education alternative who first organized Yankton's Missouri Valley Christian Academy (MVCA) in Fall 2008. Preparing for those first days as a Christ-centered education option took the best part of seven months as certifications, accreditations and all the formal requirements of an organized educational entity were met.

Lauren Nelson, one of the parents who diligently worked with that first group to develop the school, remembers well the goals set for making the school a reality.

"MVCA was never intended as a replacement for the home and church as the primary settings for Christian instruction," Nelson says. "It's an extension of these two and for parents who want their children to learn in a Christian environment. For those of us who worked to organize the school, we had a strong desire to see our own children in a non-denominational school as well as a desire to make that opportunity available to other families in our community."

The school today has a mission to "provide education services for Christian parents wanting to strengthen moral integrity, biblical values and academic proficiency in their child while recognizing God-given talents and fostering them for a life of learning, leading and service."

The school is governed by a four-member Board of Directors and is structured in a manner that no church or denomination has ownership of the school or authority to dictate how the school operates.

"We began as a K-3rd school," Nelson says. "In the 2013-14 school year we brought the school to its goal of being a K-8th grade Christian school. In Spring 2014 we graduated our first eighth grade students."

MVCA rents space from Christ the King Lutheran Church at 305 West 25th Street. Their space includes five classrooms, office space, fellowship hall, kitchen, playground and a sanctuary for programs and chapel services. They appreciate Christ the King's

generosity toward the school. The church, a Lutheran congregation, went so far as to implement a building plan that added classroom space.

"Christ the King is a great landlord," Nelson says. "They have been so accommodating, even sharing in our vision for the school when they took on the financial burden to build on four additional classrooms. We so appreciate the fact that they want us here."

Students come from as far away as Tyndall, seeking the education environment found at MVCA. For the first half of the 2014-2015 school year, MVCA has 36 students enrolled.

Teachers like to point out that the school integrates Biblical knowledge and history into standard education activities. A variety of resources are used for curriculum, with each source selected for its ability to help students achieve a high standard of knowledge through hands on learning. Iowa Tests of Basic

Skills (ITBS) indicate that MVCA students consistently score well above their grade level for student achievement.

MVCA teachers bring a great deal of professionalism to the classroom, with three out of five teachers holding Master's of Education degrees. Because of their small size, teachers find themselves working together as a close-knit team.

"With small class sizes, we're able to focus on individual student needs and skills," Laurie Hanson, first grade teacher, says. "That's helpful for character development and identifying individual gifts. Even though we're small, students have regular physical education classes, music, art and computer classes. Our new 'Meet the Masters' art program helps them deepen their understanding of art history and art opportunities."

While annual tuition provides an income stream for MVCA, MVCA's Board President, Brian Brandt, strongly emphasizes that cost should never deter students from enrolling.

"We are also funded through donors and fund raising activities," Brandt says. "We have never turned a student away because of money issues."

One of the key things that sets MVCA

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

Thank you to all teachers, past and present, for making a difference in the lives of our children.

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